

A N.
ACCOUNT
OF
SAFFRON:

The Manner of its
CULTURE and saving for Use,
WITH THE
ADVANTAGES

It will be of to this

KINGDOM.

Published by Order of the DUBLIN
SOCIETY.

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AN ACCOUNT OF THE MANNER OF ITS CULTURE AND SAVING FOR USE, WITH THE ADVANTAGES OF THIS KINGDOM.



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A C C O U N T
O F
S A F F R O N, &c.



*S*AFFRON agreeing with this Climate; the number of Hands that are employ'd in the Culture; three fourths at least of the Charge being for Labour, and two thirds of that, for such as cannot otherwise expect any Wages, will I hope, be a sufficient Apology for offering to this Society, the account of its Management in *England*, as communicated to the *Royal Society* in 1729, by Dr. *James Douglas*, with some Remarks thereon.

The greatest Plenty of Saffron is cultivated in *Cambridgeshire*, in a Circle of about 10 Miles
A 2 Diameter,

Diameter, as it has been there planted longest, and with the most success; the Method they use, should seem more eligible.

The Custom is there to Crop two Years, and Fallow the third. Saffron is always planted on the Fallow, and other circumstances agreeing, they prefer that which bore Barley the Year before.

They seldom plant above two Acres, and in choosing them, the principal thing, they have a regard to, is, that it is well exposed, the Soil not poor, nor a very stiff Clay, but a temperate dry Mould, such as lies on Chalk.

About *Lady-day*, they carefully Plough it, and draw the Furrows much closer, and deeper, (if the Soil will allow it,) than is done for any Corn; in *May* they lay between twenty, or thirty Loads of Dung on each Acre, which being spread, they Plough it in; the shortest, most rotten Dung, is best: about *Midsummer* they plough a third time, and between every Pole, in breadth, they leave a Furrow, or Trench, to throw the Weeds in, at the proper Season.

They fence the whole with dead Hedges, or Hurdles, not only to keep out Cattle, but especially Hares, who are very fond of the Leaves, in Winter.

The warm Summers are best for this Plant; if there be gentle Showers from time to time, they
seldom

seldom miss of a Crop, if the extreme Cold, of the foregoing Winter have not prejudic'd the Heads.

They plant in *July*; thus, One Man with a Spit-shovel raises between three or four Inches of Earth, and throws it before him, about six Inches; two Women, following with Roots, place them in the farthest edge of the Trench, at three Inches distance; as soon as the Digger has gone the Breadth of the Trench, he begins at the other side and digging as before, covers the Roots last set, and makes the same room for the Setters to place a new Row, at the same distance from the first that they are from one another. The only nicety in Trenching, is to leave some part of the first stratum of Earth, untouched to lie under the Roots, and in setting to place the Roots directly on the Bottoms. Formerly when Roots were dear, they did not plant them so thick, and now they have a regard to their size, planting the largest, at a greater Distance than the small.

The quantity of Roots, planted in an Acre, is generally 128 Bushels, which according to the mentioned Distances, and supposing them to be an Inch in Diameter ought to amount to 392,040. in number.

In *September* the Ground must be carefully pared with a sharp Hough, and the Weeds raked into the Furrows.

In some time after appear the Flowers, which are gathered as well before, as after full Blowing,

early in the Morning, they pull the whole Flowers, throwing them into Baskets; which work is commonly done before ten or eleven o' Clock.

Being carried Home, and spread on a large Table, placing themselves round it, they pick out the Chives, as also a long portion of the Style to which they are joined; the rest of the flower is useless. This Work they repeat, daily, even on *Sundays*, untill the whole Crop is gathered.

The Chives being picked, are dried on a Kiln; The Kiln is built on a thick Plank, (that it may be moved from place to place,) supported by four short Legs; the Outside consists of eight pieces of Wood, about three Inches thick, joined in form of a Quadrangular Frame, about twelve Inches square at bottom, on the inside, and twenty two Inches at top, which is equal to the Perpendicular of it. On the fore-side is left a hole eight Inches square, and four Inches above the Plank, through which they put the Fire. Over all, Laths are nail'd and plaistered on both sides, as is the Plank at the bottom, which serves for a Hearth. Over the Mouth, or widest Part, a Hair-cloth is fixed to two sides, and to two rollers, which are turn'd by Wedges, or Screws, in order to stretch the Cloth; instead of a Hair-cloth, many use a Net-work of Iron Wire by which the Saffron is dried quicker, and with less fuel, but the difficulty of keeping the Saffron from burning, makes the Hair-cloth to be preferred.

The

The Kiln being placed in a light part of the House, they lay five or six sheets of Paper on the Hair-cloth, on which they spread the wet Saffron, between two or three Inches thick, this they cover with other Sheets of white Paper, and then a Blanket, five or six times doubled, or a Canvas pillow stuff'd with Straw; after the fire has been lighted some time the whole is covered with a Board, on which is a large weight.

At first they give a strong Heat, to make the Chives sweat, but if this is not done with care, the Saffron is scorched, and so all is spoiled, that is on the Kiln.

When it has been thus dry'd for an hour, they take off all the coverings, then they take the Saffron off from the under Paper, raising the edges of the Cake with a thin Knife, and sliding a thin Board, between the under Papers and Hair-cloth, they turn it upside down, and cover it as before. This heat they continue for an hour, they turn and lay the weight on, as before. If nothing during these hours happens amiss, they reckon the danger over, they have no more to do, but to keep a gentle fire, turning the Cake every half hour, untill it be thoroughly dry, for doing of which is generally required twenty four Hours.

In drying the plump Chives they use nothing, but in the latter end of the Crop, when the Chives are smaller and not so fat, they sprinkle the Cake
with

with a little small Beer, to make it sweat, and use two linnen Cloths, instead of Paper, next to the Saffron.

Any Fewel will do, but that which smoaks least is best, and therefore Charcoal is preferred.

Sometimes, five or six pounds of wet Chives are got from one Rood, sometimes not above one or two, and sometimes not enough to be worth while to gather, and dry. About five pounds of wet Chives go to make one pound of dry Saffron, for the first three Weeks of the Crop, and six pounds for the last Week. At a medium, two pounds of Saffron may be allowed to an Acre for the first Crop, and twenty four for the two Years remaining, the third Year is considerably larger than the second.

There is only a repetition every Year of Houghing, Picking, and Drying, without any thing new, except they let the Cattle into the Fields, after the Leaves are decay'd, to feed on the Weeds, or mow them for the same use.

About *Midsummer* after the third Crop is gathered, the Roots must be all taken up, and transplanted; they break the Ground, sometimes by a Plough, others use a forked Hough, and then the Ground is harrowed once or twice over, during all which time of ploughing, or digging, or harrowing, fifteen Hands will find work enough to follow, and gather up the Heads, or Roots; then they carry them in Sacks, to the House, there

there to be clean'd, or ras'd. This labour consists in clearing the Roots thoroughly from the Earth, and the remains of old Roots, old Involucra's, and Excrescencies, and thus they become fit to be planted immediately, or kept some time without spoiling.

The quantity of Roots taken up, at a Medium, allowing for all accidents, from each Acre may be 192 Bushels. They chuse the largest, plumpest, and fattest Roots, but above all reject the longish pointed ones, which they call Spickets, for very small round, or flat Roots, are observ'd sometimes to flower.

This is the whole Culture, the attending Charges and profits of an Acre, one Year with another, according to the price of Labour in this Country, is in the annexed Scheme.

Rent for 3 Years, —————	3	00	00
Ploughing three times, —————	0	18	00
Dunging, —————	3	12	00
Hedging, —————	1	16	00
Spitting and setting the Heads, —	1	12	00
Weeding, and paring the Ground, —	1	04	00
Gathering and picking the Flowers, —	6	10	00
Drying the Flowers, —————	1	06	00
Instruments of Labour for 3 Years,	0	10	00
Ploughing once, harrowing twice,	0	12	00
Gathering the Heads or Roots. —	1	00	00
Raising, or cleaning the Roots, —	1	12	00
<i>Total Charge.</i>	23	12	00

The

The mean price of Saffron I would fix at thirty Shillings *per* Pound. If the mean produce is twenty six pounds from an Acre, the amount will be thirty nine Pounds Sterling, which is fifteen Pound eight Shillings neat profit, for the three Years, or five Pound two Shillings and eight pence yearly. This is supposing all the Labour was to be hired, for ready Money, but as the Planter and his Family do a considerable part, some of this expence is saved. That is, by planting Saffron, he may not only clear about five pound yearly *per* Acre, but also maintain himself and Family, for some part of each Year.

I have said nothing here, concerning the Charge in buying or Profits in selling the Roots, because these must at length ballance one another.

So far Dr. *Douglas*.

Dr. *Blair* in his account is prolix, on the Generation of new Roots from the old ones, which dye every Year, but as his Philosophy is more for Speculation, than the Improvement of the Planter, I shall take no other notice of it, than that he tried the Spicket Roots, several Years, but could not produce one single Flower from any of them.

Mortimer, Laurence, Bradley, and Miller, with some others have given very general and imperfect Directions, such as are in no wise, worth notice.

Not

Not only from the report of others, but from repeated trials, of the Saffron, I have rais'd, and several little parcels, I have purchased from others; the Saffron produced by this Country is superiour in every Quality, to that of other Countries, and was I to ascertain the proportion; I would say, one Ounce of *Irisb* Saffron is equal to an Ounce and half of *Englisb*, three Ounces of *French*, and four or five Ounces of *Spanisb*.

A little Experience, arising from Curiosity would lead me to choose a sandy loose Soil; such is most agreeable to all bulbous Roots; and if not naturally so, I would rather manure with Sea-sand than Dung.

The best time for gathering, in respect to the flowers, is before they are fully open, that in the Scheme mark'd 2, is in the fittest state, Number 3, is rather too soon, but I would recomend the gathering of it, for fear before the succeeding Morning, it will be too ripe, for the Sun in three or four hours, will much decay the Chives, in such manner; as is endeavour'd to be express'd by the flower, mark'd 1.

The number of Chives, in each flower, is generally three, often four, and sometimes, tho' but very seldom, you will meet with five, in one flower.

Rather than question the Veracity of the Doctor's Account, I would impute some disagreements
between

between his Account, and my Observations, to our Soil and Climate.

By his account, in *England* they blow in *September*, with me, it is always in *October*.

He says, the first Year, an Acre will produce, two pounds of dry Saffron, and it should seem, the second Year, eleven pounds, and the third thirteen pounds, and that the wet Chives loose four fifths and five sixths in drying.

The proportional Produce of an *Irish* Acre would be, taking whole quantities, three Pounds, seventeen Pounds, and twenty one Pounds.

My Plantation is about 420 square feet, and excluding the first year, I never had less than in the proportion of twenty five pounds, and a Member of this *Society*, assures me, from about thirty Feet square, a Relation of his, in the County of *Wexford*, had half a pound of dried Saffron, which is much more *per* Acre.

My mode of preserving Saffron, by immersing it in high rectified Spirits of Wine, has in the general hindred an accurate account of the loss in drying; but if my Notes are right, to which corresponds the account of others, the *Irish* Saffron looses but two thirds in the drying.

That

That the Roots do encrease but one third in three years, as by the Doctor's Account, not a little surprises me. My Original Stock about eighteen Years ago, was 100, I brought from *England*. In 1728 I had at least a Barrel, in number probably 10,600, whereas, had the progressive increase been in his Proportion, they could have been but 750. I have often told the Produce, or Offsets of a single Root, and generally found, twelve or fourteen fit to be planted, and very often, many more; and this in a soil, far from being so proper, at least, by Nature, as I should advise to be chosen.

But let the Doctor's Account be allowed, and his product of dry Saffron; and the mean Price here, to be thirty seven Shillings *Irish*, which is as little as ever I knew it, often forty, fifty, Shillings *per* Pound, and sometimes more. The account will stand thus, rateing our Land and Labour, equally dear with the *English*.

The product of an Acre, in three Years will be				
			<i>l.</i>	<i>s.</i> <i>d.</i>
forty one pounds, Value, —————		75	17	00
All Charges for the 3 Years will be —		34	00	00
		—————		
Profit to the Planter, —————		41	17	00

The Custom-house Books, only tell us, what is fairly Imported, and reports such a Quantity, as I have reason to believe, is far short of the truth;

truth; it lies in little room, and should pay three Shillings Duty *per* pound : but it is not only the lessening, or abolishing the Import, I would hope for, but the making it an exportable Commodity, and the applying it to some general Mechanick uses, which now its dearness forbids.

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F I N I S.



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